

***Begonia peninsulae* (Begoniaceae), a Confused Species from Malesia**

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Abstract

Begonia peninsulae Irmsch. subsp. *peninsulae* from Trengganu, Peninsular Malaysia, is synonymous with *B. rajah* Ridl. and *B. peninsulae* subsp. *tambelanense* Irmsch. is raised to specific rank as *B. tambelanense* (Irmsch.) Kiew.

Introduction

Irmscher (1929) recognised two subspecies within his *Begonia peninsulae*: ssp. *peninsulae* from Trengganu and ssp. *tambelanense* from the Tambelan Islands. These were both based on a mixture of plants cultivated in the Singapore Botanic Gardens and the Penang Botanic Garden. The ones collected from the Singapore Botanic Gardens in Ridley's time (one from Trengganu; the other from the Tambelan Islands) have a clear provenance. However, later collections are without provenance and, in the case of those from Penang, are from batches that include many exotic ornamental begonias. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that they are plants of wild-collected origin. In addition, these two subspecies are clearly not conspecific as one has a cordate leaf and the other a peltate one.

Subspecies *peninsulae*

Irmscher cited one specimen from Trengganu (which was spelt 'Tringganu' on the label), which is without a number or information on the date and collector. The botanical name is written as '*Begonia raja*'. 'Ridley' has been added as the collector in a different hand after Irmscher's publication.

This specimen matches those of *Begonia rajah* Ridl. in characters of the leaf, inflorescence and fruit. Despite the leaf being exceptionally large (11.5 x 16 cm as opposed to 5.5–7.5 x 5.5–7.5 cm in wild plants of *B. rajah*), the leaf base, like *B. rajah*, is deeply cordate and, even in the dried state, the variegation is conspicuous with the veins lighter than the rest of the lamina. This specimen might be one of the

plants originally collected in Trengganu (which Ridley spelt as Tringganu) or its progeny that was cultivated in the Botanic Gardens Singapore from where it was introduced into the ornamental trade in England. *B. peninsulae* ssp. *peninsulae* is therefore reduced to synonymy with *B. rajah*.

The other specimens of ssp. *peninsulae* cited by Irmscher are very different in that they are all peltate (*B. rajah* never has peltate leaves). These specimens, *Burkill Begonia* No. 16 July 1917 (SING), *Burkill* 6114 31 Aug 1920 (SING), were cultivated in the Penang Botanic Garden and have no provenance. In leaf size, shape, colour, surface ('coppery and bullate') and margin they are identical to *Begonia goegoensis* N.E. Brown from Sumatra, which is one of the few Asian begonias that is easy to grow under local conditions.

***Begonia rajah* Ridl.**

Gard. Chron. III, 16 (1894) 213 & Fig. 31. **Type:** *Native Collector s.n.* 1892 'Tringganu' (Trengganu) (holo K ex SING¹)

Synonym nova: *Begonia peninsulae* Irmscher ssp. *peninsulae*, Mitt. Inst. Allg. Bot. Hamburg, 8 (1929) 98. **Type:** 'Tringganu' without collector, number or date (K ex SING¹).

Subspecies *tambelanense*

Irmscher described this subspecies (a begonia with peltate leaves) from a collection by Ridley made in 1895 from a plant that was cultivated in the Botanic Garden Singapore. This, in turn, was originally collected by Pereira from the Tambelan Islands, NW of Pontianak, Indonesian Borneo.

It is very different from the specimen of his subsp. *peninsulae* (= *B. rajah*) from Trengganu as not only are the leaves peltate with a long acumen but the petiole and lower surface of the veins are conspicuously hairy. (Those of *B. rajah* are deeply cordate with a short acumen and are more or less glabrous). Again, Irmscher included plants of unknown provenance collected from both Gardens – *Nur Begonia* No. 2 (SING), *Nur Begonia* No. 3 (K, SING) both dated March 1917 from the Botanic

¹ When Irmscher monographed the begonias of Peninsular Malaysia he borrowed the entire collection of the Singapore Botanic Gardens (SING) and these he annotated and cited in his monograph. He did not consult the collection at Kew (K) and none of their specimens is cited by him. A considerable number of unicate types are no longer to be found at SING but are now at K. We have no record of how they came to be transferred but they are definitely the Singapore types as they bear Irmscher's original annotations. These are cited as K ex SING in this account.

Gardens Singapore; and *Burkill Begonia No. 1* (SING) July 1917, *Burkill 6115* (SING) 31 Aug 1920 from the Penang Botanic Garden. These are among a gathering of begonias by Burkill that included ornamental begonias made over 20 years after the original Pereira specimen was introduced into Singapore. It is unlikely that the Tambelan plants had survived so long.

These garden plants differ from the original collection by Ridley in their more densely pilose petioles and distinctly toothed leaf margin. Irmscher had already raised the possibility that these were pot plants (Topfpflanzen) and that they differed from the Tambelan plant in leaf size (6.5–17 x 8.5–24 cm), margin and acumen length. The Tambelan plant is therefore regarded as a distinct species and is here raised to specific rank.

To add confusion, Irmscher also recognised a hybrid between the two subspecies, *Burkill 6113* 31 Aug 1920 (SING), because he considered it was intermediate between the two subspecies. This specimen is less hairy and has a less conspicuously toothed margin than *Burkill 6115* but it does not resemble *B. goegoensis* (*Burkill 6114*) at all.

***Begonia tambelanense* (Irmsch.) Kiew, stat. nov.**

Basynym: *Begonia peninsulae* Irmsch. ssp. *tambelanense* Irmsch. Mitt. Inst. Allg. Bot. Hamburg. 8 (1929) 100. **Type:** *Ridley s.n.* 31 Aug 1895 Botanic Gardens Singapore originally collected by Pereira from Tambelan Is. (holo K ex SING¹).

Reference

Irmscher, E. 1929. Die Begoniaceen der Malaiischen Halbinsel. *Mitteilung aus dem Institut für allgemeine Botanik in Hamburg*. **8**: 86–160.